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Department of Medical Genetics

SONNLEBORN

May 5, 1957

Dear Tracy:

Your telegram was very kind. The news of my election was rather astonishing, and it took me some time to understand how it could have happened. I am not trying to deprecate either myself or the Academy, but I had thought that it did give high marks for venerability, as well as for other qualifications. However, when I read through the membership lists in Botany and in Zoology, I found so many names of good friends that the result appeared more credible.

Precisely for this reason, I ask you advice on a connected issue. I am asked now to indicate my preference for sectional membership. My first thought of course is to Botany, which proposed my name, and where there are many congenial fellows. Perhaps that is all that should be said about it. However, my own recent administrative preoccupations are in medicine—the whole point of the new departmental arrangement is to bring in a new point of view from a basic science. Would there be a parallel consideration in the Academy? For this reason, I was wondering about an alternative election in the Pathology and Bacteriology section. Another voice therein might also be of some help in the nomination of candidates who have fundamental contributions, say, in virology, but do not at least in principle belong in any of the other sections. Of course if there were a Genetics section, there'd be no further question about it. I understand you're pressing for some such reorganization.

On the whole, if the only pertinence of sectional affiliation is the proposal of new candidates, there's no point making any fuss, and Botany it is. If there ever is more serious business which is handled along sectional lines, I could make a more distinctive contribution in the other section; my point of view would already be reflected many times over in Botany and Zoology already. Of course, I have no idea how welcome I'd be in P&B, and also run the risk of offending some of my friends/who did go out of their way. Have you any thoughts on this?

in Botany

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg